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ABSTRACT

Guidelines that offer a model plan of study to provide candidates for teacher certification in psychology with sufficient knowledge to teach in secondary schools are presented. All secondary psychology teachers should have a thorough understanding of the empirically based principles of behavior and of the evidential approach to the study of behavior. Because those seeking certification may have followed different educational paths, three alternative plans to obtain psychology certification are presented. Each plan requires prospective psychology teachers to study both the content and the method of psychology. While courses that will help teachers develop sensitivity to adolescents' needs should be required of all secondary teachers, these courses should not be considered part of the specialty training of psychology teachers. Nor does a haphazard collection of introductory psychology, psychological foundations of education, mental health, and social studies methods courses assure sufficient background for a psychology teacher. Regardless of the field of certification, a separate endorsement with specific requirements in psychology should be added to the certificate. (RM)

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GUIDELINES FOR THE SPECIALTY TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS OF PSYCHOLOGY

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American Psychological Association

1978

GUIDELINES FOR THE SPECIALTY TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS OF PSYCHOLOGY[1]

Committee on Psychology in the Secondary Schools[2]

Psychology is a broadly diverse field that has been recognized as a scientific discipline since the 1870s. Its content ranges from social science topics akin to sociology and anthropology to natural science foci related to biology and physiology. The thread uniting the field has two strands: a concern with behavior and reliance on empirical and evidential methods.

Accordingly, all secondary school teachers of psychology should have a firm and broad grounding of the empirically based principles of behavior and a thorough grasp of the evidential approach to the study of behavior. Appropriate preparation for secondary school teachers of psychology is a plan of study offered at an accredited college or university. Because those seeking certification as secondary school teachers of psychology may have followed different educational paths, alternative plans to obtain certification in this area are proposed.

Recommended Courses Leading to Certification

Plan A

This plan would consist of a coherent set of courses that provides systematic study in the areas* of general psychology, experimental psychology, social psychology, physiological psychology, personality, and the history of psychology. It would also include courses on

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*It is not the intent of the APA to recommend specific courses carrying these titles. Rather, these guidelines are designed to assist teacher training institutions and state certification agencies in identifying areas of study that will give secondary school psychology teachers a thorough and broad preparation in both the content and the methods of psychology.

methods of investigation that focus on research design, statistics, and assessment and evaluation of the individual. Students who have successfully completed such a set of courses would have adequate depth and breadth of training in psychology to permit them to function as competent teachers of psychology at the secondary school level.

Plan B

In recent years, colleges and universities have experimented with curriculum designs that differ from the more traditional approach implied in Plan A. An alternative route to certification must be provided for students in these programs, who by virtue of different course titles, interdepartmental courses, and the like, would not have taken the same kind of courses but would have covered the same areas of study. These candidates should qualify for certification, provided they show training equivalent to Plan A on an area-for-area basis.

Plan C

Candidates who do not qualify under Plans A and B may be certified by demonstration of competence and knowledge equivalent to that indicated in Plan A as appraised through a specific plan such as the following: (a) examination arranged through a psychology department of an accredited college or university or (b) standardized test in psychology (e.g., GRE Advanced Test in Psychology) passed at a level acceptable to the psychology department of an accredited college or university.

Comment

These guidelines offer a model plan of study that is likely to provide candidates for certification with sufficient knowledge of psychology to teach in the secondary school. They also signal that a haphazard collection of introductory psychology, psychological foundations of education, mental health, and social studies methods courses does not in itself assure sufficient depth and breadth of background for a secondary school teacher of psychology.

Because student interest tends to be high in areas such as psychopathology, developmental psychology, and counseling psychology, secondary school teachers of psychology should be urged to seek additional study in these areas, but primary concern, and certification requirements, should remain focused on the basic content and methods of the field. Additional courses in such areas as psychopathology, developmental psychology, and counseling psychology will not necessarily give the teacher any technical competence to function as a professional psychological counselor to students, other teachers, or parents. Persons with the training outlined in Plan A (or its equivalent) would be competent only as classroom teachers dealing with the subject matter of psychology.

All secondary school teachers, regardless of their field, need courses in areas of study that will help them be sensitive to the needs of adolescents. These courses should be considered part of the professional preparation of all teachers and not part of the specialty training of secondary school teachers of psychology.

There are many different ways to organize the content of secondary school psychology courses. For example, some experts recommend presenting psychology as a subject-matter field, much like biology, physics, or anthropology. Others, with equally compelling reasons, would organize the course around concepts of human development, particularly adolescent psychology. Both foci represent appropriate ways of presenting the subject matter of the field, depending on the needs of the particular school and curriculum in which the course will be offered. These and other options make it difficult to set specific guidelines for the classification of psychology in the secondary school as a social science, natural science or behavioral science. Teacher trainers and certification officers should be guided in decisions about classification by consultation with appropriate groups, such as the faculty of psychology departments at colleges and universities in the state. Regardless of the classification, however, all secondary school teachers of psychology should have a thorough and broad preparation in both the content and the methods of psychology.

The American Psychological Association endorses the idea that a well-constructed methods course in the candidate's intended teaching field is a necessary part of the professional preparation of secondary school teachers. The course should prepare teachers to set forth clear educational objectives for students and identify appropriate teaching methods to attain these objectives.

Recommended for Implementation

Although there are currently many thousands of secondary school teachers of psychology, relatively few of them teach psychology full-time because the demand for full-time psychology teachers is small, and it may well remain small for some years to come. Thus, training and certification in psychology alone is not realistic or practical in most cases. However, the American Psychological Association wishes to recommend the following to Secondary School State Certification Boards in order to implement Plans A, B, or C as described in these guidelines:

Regardless of the field in which a teacher is certified (e.g., social/behavioral sciences or natural sciences), a separate endorsement with specific requirements in psychology should be added to the existing certificate.

Under this recommendation, secondary school teachers of psychology would be fully prepared and certified to teach some other specialty as well as psychology.

These guidelines are intended to apply to the training and certification of any teacher of psychology in any secondary school, without regard to the fraction of time spent teaching psychology.

Footnotes

[1]These guidelines were approved by the Education and Training Board, the Board of Directors, and the Council of Representatives of the American Psychological Association.

[2]Members of the Committee who helped develop these guidelines are John Bare (ex officio), Evelyn Frye, Frank B. W. Hawkinshire, Mary Margaret Moffett, Maxine Warnath, and Michael Wertheimer.